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published in

The History of Linguistics in Texts and Contexts.- Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft in Texten und Konzepten. Two volumes

2004

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Noordegraaf, J. (2004). From 'Radical Enlightenment' to Comparative Historical Linguistics. The study of language in the Netherlands around 1700. In G. Hassler, & G. Volkman (Eds.), *The History of Linguistics in Texts and Contexts.- Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft in Texten und Konzepten. Two volumes* (pp. 155-168). Nodus Publikationen.

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From: *The History of Linguistics in Texts and Contexts. – Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft in Texten und Konzepten*. Two volumes. Ed. by / hrsg. v. Gerda Haßler & Gesina Volkmann. Münster: Nodus Publikationen 2004. Vol. I, 155-168. ISBN 3-89323-227-3

FROM ‘RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT’ TO COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

The study of language in the Netherlands around 1700 ¹

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with early eighteenth-century Dutch linguistics, a period that in the history of the study of Dutch has enjoyed a poor reputation for at least the past hundred years. As it happens, the eighteenth century is supposed to be densely populated by linguistic *non valeurs*, spelling freaks, schoolmasters, and language tyrants who mainly occupied themselves with orthography, so-called gender lists, and other – to our mind – relatively insignificant matters. In other words, eighteenth-century linguistics in the Netherlands appears to have been just *een schrale weide*, a poor pasture, the study of which could only yield *onverkwikkelijke lectuur*, unsavoury reading (cf. de Vooy 1947: 11). Moreover, the German writer Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) is reported to have uttered some fairly critical remarks on the way things were proceeding in the Netherlands. Heine apparently noted that “when the world will perish, you had better go to the Netherlands. For in that country everything happens fifty years later”. If Heine is right, my paper is also supposed to deal with a country which was linguistically fifty years behind the times. So “the study of language in the Netherlands around 1700” hardly seems a very exciting and promising subject to address. To my opinion, however, it is time we revised this rather unappealing image of eighteenth-century linguistics in the Netherlands. But what more can there be to this story other than the inevitable discussions on spelling and normative grammar?

In his book on the history of the Dutch Republic, Jonathan Israel presents a vivid depiction of “the Rise, the Greatness and the Fall” of the Dutch Republic. Although it is true that his book concentrates on politics and social-economic life in the Netherlands in the years 1477-1806, it is striking to see that the entry ‘linguistics’ appears [156] only once in the index. This sole reference applies to the works of an Amsterdam *Privatgelehrter*, viz. Lambert ten Kate (1674-1731). Within the framework of the Dutch Enlightenment, ten Kate is seen by Israel as a typical exponent of eighteenth-century Dutch mainstream Enlightenment. Ten Kate’s voluminous work on Dutch, the *Aenleiding tot de kennisse van het verbevene deel der Nederduitsche sprake* (‘Introduction to the study of the elevated part of the Dutch language’, 1723), is nowadays generally seen as the “high point” (Vivien Law) of comparative historical language study in the eighteenth century, in particular when one takes into consideration the European context.

Referring to the works of Lambert ten Kate and his “teacher”, the Amsterdam grammarian Adriaen Verwer (ca. 1655-1717), I would like to give a tentative definition of some contours of

¹ I would like to thank Igor van de Bilt (Philippine), Frederick Schwinck (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), and Rienk Vermij (Universiteit Maastricht), for valuable information and stimulating discussions.

what I call Dutch Enlightenment Linguistics, and I will do so by bringing to the fore what I consider to be two of its main features: its empirical slant, and its recourse to history.

2. Amsterdam around 1700

In his fascinating study on the *Radical Enlightenment; The making of modernity* (2001) the Harvard historian Jonathan Israel defends the intriguing thesis that the Enlightenment did not begin in Britain or France but actually had its starting point in seventeenth-century Holland. Spinoza and Spinozism were in fact the intellectual backbone of the European Radical Enlightenment everywhere, not only in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and Scandinavia but also in Britain and Ireland. Consequently, in this exposition the much-debated philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-1677), at the time regarded as a most dangerous atheist, plays a crucial role. Note that the renowned Dutch tolerance of heretic ideas definitely had its limits. Jonathan Israel brings us back to amongst other things this “fraught world of philosophical debate in Amsterdam in the early 1680s, an arena where Spinozists and anti-Spinozists grappled unremittingly for the upper hand” (Israel 2001: 309). Such must still have been the atmosphere when the German lexicographer and etymologist Johann Georg Wachter (1663-1757) spent some time in Amsterdam during his study tour in 1698-1699. His stay in the Dutch capital is said to have been “the most formative cultural encounter of his life” (Israel 2001: 645). Wachter wrote a book on *Spinozismus* (Amsterdam 1699), but I will not expatiate on that here. Within the context of the present paper, however, it would be interesting to know whether he had encountered Dutch anti-Spinozists such as Adriaen Verwer, and linguists such as Lambert ten Kate.

3. Adriaen Verwer

One of those who participated enthusiastically in the contemporary discussions on philosophy was Adriaen Verwer (ca. 1655-1717), a *mercator sapiens* and self-educated jurist who was not afraid of fierce debates on linguistic matters. Moreover, this pious Amsterdam Mennonite merchant was also an inspired amateur mathematician. In 1683, he wrote a polemical treatise against the Spinozism of his days, so turning against what is called the ‘Radical Enlightenment’, and the year 1698 saw the publication [157] of his apology of Christianity. Among students of language, however, Verwer is first and foremost known as a grammarian. His achievements include the composition of a Latin grammar of Dutch, *Linguae belgicae idea grammatica, poetica, rhetorica* (1707, 1783²), which was published under a pseudonym, viz. “Anonymus Batavus”. In the years 1708-1710 he defended the views put forward in his grammar by publishing various linguistic ‘open letters’. Here I would like to mention two interesting aspects of his linguistic work: the turning to history, and the methodology which he applied.

In the *praefatio* to his grammar, Verwer, who was an ardent admirer of Franciscus Junius (1589-1677), emphasized that it was of great importance “linguam nostram *ex origine* nosse”, to know our language from its origin (1783: viii). Verwer acknowledged that it had become possible to do so thanks to the works of Junius, the editor of the legendary Gothic *Codex Argenteus* (1665, 1684²), whom he dubs a scholar of perennial fame. Unlike Junius (cf. Dekker 2002a: 146), Verwer was an advocate of the *gothica-genetrix* theory, by which Gothic was considered to be the mother of all Germanic languages. In considering his mother tongue, Verwer felt certain that in the past there had been a *seculum analogum*, an era during which the Dutch language had been characterized by a perfect *analogia*, regularity, and it was from that period of history that Verwer sought the norm for contemporary Dutch, in an attempt to restore its lost regularity. Consequently, he showed a keen interest in Gothic and Middle Dutch.

Verwer's linguistic works should be seen as a reaction to Dutch representatives of the *grammaire raisonnée*, a doctrine which aimed to regulate language on the basis of logic. Amongst other things Verwer argued: "You will see that here the laws of language are not produced from the intellect (*e cerebro*), but from the deepest reality of language, and are also reproduced from the correct usage" (Verwer 1783: vi). He loathed what he referred to as *gefabrijkte regelen*, made-up rules; a grammarian, he maintained, is just a cartographer, making a map of the land, but definitely not someone who actually divides-up the land (cf. 1708: 551; 1709: 5). What is striking then, when reading Verwer, is his empirico-inductive approach. No grand deductive systems, and nothing should be made up; just hold to unprejudiced observation – this is Verwer's slogan.

According to Verwer, the linguist should formulate a "*hypothesis*" on the basis of observations, to be tested time and again on linguistic facts. The rules to be formulated should be of a general character and should cover all phenomena. And if one finds regularity in certain phenomena, then it may be assumed, on the basis of analogy, that this regularity is of a general character and may also apply to phenomena which have not yet been observed, following the "natural axiom" that '*Dat gelijk uit gelijk voortkomt*', that "like stems from like", as Verwer (1709: 36) phrased it.

I assume that this "natural axiom" is borrowed from Newton's *Principia mathematica*; it is to be found in one of Newton's *regulae philosophandi*, 'rules of reasoning in philosophy', which had been laid down in the third book of the *Principia*. 'Regula II' reads in the English translation of 1729: "Therefore to the same natural effect we must, as far as possible, assign the same causes" [158] (Newton 1729: 398).² What, now, is the connection between this Englishman and his Dutch contemporary?

4. Isaac Newton and Dutch linguistics

The answer to this question is not very difficult. Verwer belonged to a group of Amsterdam amateur mathematicians which as early as 1690 maintained personal contact with a group of Scottish scientists; these Scots were adherents of Isaac Newton's (1643-1727), seeking to further develop his theories. Thus at an early stage Verwer was acquainted with Newton's celebrated *Principia mathematica* (1687); it was a book which was studied diligently within certain Amsterdam circles (Vermij 1991: 114-115). "Ego horam subsecivam libro Newtoni impendo" – 'I spent every free hour reading the book by Newton, and I am more and more astonished about his superb mind', Verwer wrote in 1703 to one of his British correspondents, expressing his admiration (cf. Rigaud 1841: 250). Note that this was all many years before an Amsterdam *editio ultima, auctior et emendatio*, a pirate edition of the *Principia*, came from the presses in 1714 and Newtonianism began to be taught *ex cathedra* by Hermannus Boerhaave (1668-1738)³ and other Dutch scholars as it spread right across Europe. Be this as it may, I think that Verwer initially sought to deploy Newton's ideas for his own philosophical and apologetic purposes.

In the year 1680 Verwer continued his trade activities in Amsterdam, where Spinozism had met with much less resistance among Anabaptists than in Rotterdam, the place where he had lived and worked until then. Inspired by his new contacts and the Spinozism of his youth, Verwer decided to pen a refutation of Spinoza's philosophy. He saw the 'radical' Spinoza as a man with very dangerous opinions, and so he waged war on Spinoza and his followers. Verwer's anti-Spinoza treatise '*t Mom-ansicht der Atheistery afgerukt door een verhandeling van den aangeboren stand der menschen*' ('Atheism unmasked in an essay concerning the natural state of mankind', 1683) is

² "Idéoque effectuum naturalium ejusdem generis eadem assignandae sunt causae, quâtenus fieri potest" (Newton 1742: 2).

³ "The rise of Boerhaave, who by the 1720s was the foremost figure of Dutch academe, marked the final overthrow of Cartesian deductive science in the United Provinces" (Israel 1995: 1044).

generally considered to be a genuine refutation of Spinoza's philosophy. It was published anonymously in Amsterdam in the year that John Locke (1632-1704) took up residence in the Republic, where his celebrated *Essay concerning human understanding* (1690) was to be written. I may refer to Jonathan Israel's book for a balanced discussion of 'Atheism unmasked' (cf. Israel 2001: 309-310), but I would like to add that Verwer also wrote an *Inleiding tot de Christelyke Godsgeleertheit* ('Introduction to Christian theology', 1698), a Christian apology, a copy of which he actually sent – or tried to send – to Newton (cf. Rigaud 1841: 253). In this booklet one finds various explicit references to the latter's *Principia* and at the end, Verwer posits a theological thesis *dialecto Newtoniana*, in the 'Newtonian tongue', namely a mathematical formula. Note that in this work Verwer makes a reference in passing to grammar and dictionary (1698: [14]). [159]

Why was Newton hailed as a hero by Verwer and his Amsterdam band of amateur mathematicians? As Vermij sees it – and I would like to quote his pertinent conclusion in extenso –, in the later seventeenth century

[i]t was rather commonplace to put the absolute certainty of mathematics against the dubiousness of traditional philosophical or religious dogmatism. It was for this reason that Verwer and his friends were quick to appreciate the apologetic potential of Newton's theories. They did not regard them as a new philosophy, but judged them according to older, seventeenth-century standards. What made the affair really pressing, however, was the impact of Spinoza's theories. Whereas Verwer and his friends put mathematics at the service of an undogmatic, but still rather traditional piety, Spinoza demonstrated (or pretended to demonstrate) that a mathematical treatment necessarily led to far more 'radical' conclusions. This genuinely worried philosophers committed to a religious stance. On the one hand, Spinoza's conclusions were felt to be unacceptable and had to be dismissed. On the other, Spinoza referred to the very method which was deemed to confer absolute certainty. So in order to refute Spinoza, one needed to undermine the "scientific" or "mathematical" character of his work. His geometric method could only be refuted by better mathematics. This was exactly what people like Verwer were up to. And it is here that Newton was particularly useful: Newton clearly was a better scientist and mathematician than Spinoza, so he should also be regarded as more authoritative in religious matters. In the end, Newton was welcomed, regarded as a superior Spinoza (Vermij s.d.: 17-18).

Imbued as he was with Newtonian ideas, Verwer's next step appears to me a logical one: when doing linguistics, Verwer must have argued, one should also follow the empirico-inductive approach which was the hallmark of the celebrated British scholar. By adopting Newton's new philosophy as the methodological basis of his grammatical investigations, Verwer took an interesting step towards making linguistics an empirical science, and introducing a "Newtonian linguistics".⁴

5. Lambert ten Kate

When the German book collector Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach (1683-1734) stayed at Amsterdam in February and March 1711 he was shown ten Kate's extensive art collection. Ten

⁴ For this term cf. Georges Gusdorf, *Les sciences humaines et la conscience occidentale*. VI. *L'avènement des sciences humaines au siècle des lumières* (Paris: Payot, 1973). Gusdorf sees a "linguistique newtonienne" which is to replace the "linguistique cartésienne" (p. 295). On 'Newtonian Linguistics' cf. also Salverda 2001.

Kate, he noted, “handelt zwar eigentlich mit Korn, ist aber ein sehr höflicher, curiöser und dabey gelehrter Mann” (Uffenbach 1754: 651). Uffenbach’s compatriot, Jacob Christoph Le Blon (1667-1741), the inventor of three- and four colour printing, who lived in Amsterdam in the years 1702-1718, and must have known ten Kate rather well (cf. Lilien 1985: passim), provides us with more detailed information. In his preface to ten Kate’s book *The Beau Ideal* (1732) which he translated from the original French,⁵ Le Blon gave an interesting picture of his late friend: [160]

MR. LAMBERT HERMANSON TEN KATE [...] (*who died this Year*) was my dear Friend born at Amsterdam, and bred a Merchant; but having naturally took to Learning, and being wealthy enough, he laid aside Commerce, in order to cultivate his Studies; in which he was so laborious and successful, that he arrived to be truly an universal Scholar, the best Connoisseur and Judge of what he profess’d and undertook, that ever I found in all my travels, and the greatest Virtuoso in the most noble Sciences and Arts: He understood well the Italian, the French, the High-Dutch, and other modern Living Languages, and learn’d the English on purpose to read Sir Isaac Newton’s Works, of which he was a great Admirer; and was at the same Time expert in the Dead Languages, as in Hebrew, Arabick, Greek and Latin. He was a learned Historian, an excellent Musician, an Architect and Anatomist. He executed Drawing, Painting and Sculpture in an Excellency superior to any Master I knew. He publish’d several Books in Low-Dutch, while I resided in Holland, particularly he revived the ancient Gothick Tongue, of which he publish’d a Book, which I hear is much admired by the Literati, and another Book, call’d, The Creator known in his Creatures, admired by all that know it. I also saw in his Hands a little Manuscript of the Beauty of Letters, according to the true harmonious portions, which then was not publish’d: It discover’d him to be not only an excellent Writer, but able also to give Rules to all Writers (Le Blon 1732: [i]).⁶

Lambert ten Kate appears to have had a versatile mind, a typically self-educated and wealthy eighteenth-century private scholar who was seriously engaged in various fields of both the arts and the sciences. Far from being a scholarly recluse this Mennonite kept in close touch with painters, poets and professors. Among other things, he translated theological treatises from French and English into Dutch. Having learned English “on purpose to read Sir Isaac Newton’s Works, of which he was a great Admirer” (Le Blon 1732: [i]), ten Kate wrote an essay entitled “Proef-ondervinding over de scheyding der coleuren” (‘Experiment on the division of the colours’, 1716), emulating an experiment by Newton. As I mentioned before, Jonathan Israel maintains that ten Kate can be considered to be a typical exponent of the Dutch mainstream Enlightenment, the essence of which was “the overthrow of Cartesian deductive science and its replacement with *philosophia experimentalis*, a mania for scientific classification which spilled over beyond the realm of the natural sciences” (Israel 1995: 1045).

Inspired by his friend Verwer, ten Kate composed his *Gemeenschap tussen de Gottische spraeke en de Nederduytsche* (‘The Relationship between the Gothic and Dutch languages’), a relatively short

⁵ Lambert ten Kate had put forward his ideas on aesthetics in a “discours préliminaire sur le beau idéal des peintres, sculpteurs et poètes”, printed in the third volume of Jonathan Richardson’s (1665-1745) *Traité de la peinture* (1728) that had been translated from the English under the supervision of Antonie Rutgers (1695-1778) “avec l’assistance de Monsieur ten Kate”. As a matter of fact, ten Kate’s “discours” was the translation of a Dutch treatise which was composed as early as 1720. The title page of the charming booklet *The Beau Ideal* is to be found in Lilien 1985: 49.

⁶ I would like to thank Frederick Schwink for pointing out this passage to me. As it appears, it had escaped the attention of Dutch scholarship at large. I agree with Schwink (1986: 16) that there is no evidence to support Le Blon’s claim that ten Kate knew Hebrew and Arabic.

work which appeared in 1710. “Your passion for examining the fundamentals of the things you take in hand as far back as possible to their first origins has also prompted me to compile a list of *Dutch-Gothic* homophonous [161] words” is the opening sentence of his “Letter on the Gothic Language”. This letter, the first part of the *Gemeenschap*, is dated March 25th 1708 and is addressed to his friend Verwer. As I have already remarked, Verwer had emphasized that it was of great importance “*linguam nostram ex origine nosse*” (‘to know our language from its origin’), and that this had become possible thanks to Junius and his edition of the Gothic *Codex Argenteus*.

The *Gemeenschap*, which earned its author the nickname “Philogothus” (cf. Van de Bilt & Noordegraaf 2001: 23), had been written with its aim “to Explain the Ancient Foundation of the Dutch Language”. In his treatise, the *overeenkomst* (‘similarity’) between the Gothic and Dutch languages is *vertoont* (‘demonstrated’) in a letter, in a list of homophonous words, and on the basis of examples of Gothic declensions and conjugations, respectively. Among other things, it shows that the conjugation of verbs in Dutch and Gothic follows the same pattern, an insight which prompted ten Kate to divide the Gothic verbs into six classes (cf. Droixhe 1978: 112). It is in the conjugational system that ten Kate recognized the regularity of vowel alternation, which eventually led him to the discovery of the phenomenon Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) was later to call *Ablaut*. Note that there is a conspicuous ‘mission statement’ to be found in this work: “Without knowledge of the past we cannot have a thorough basis for the building of our language” (ten Kate 1710: A2r) – this clearly marks a turn to history.

The years 1710-1723 saw the full development of these and other observations into the main body of ten Kate’s *Aenleiding tot de kennisse van het verhevene deel der Nederduitsche sprake*, the ‘Introductio ad cognitionem sublimioris partis Linguae Belgicae’, as the Swedish linguist Johan Ihre (1707-1780) has it (cf. Ihre 1769, I: xxiv). The two volume *Aenleiding*, some 1500 pages, presents the first historical Dutch grammar, the concepts ‘historical’, ‘Dutch’ and ‘grammar’ being understood in a very broad sense. For the greater part the first volume is written in the form of 14 linguistic dialogues between N. (“Naameloo”, i.e., ‘nameless’, possibly Adriaen Verwer, the ‘Anonymus Batavus’) and L. (Lambert ten Kate). Among the many other pieces, one finds a fundamental essay presenting a full comparative description of the irregular verb systems of Dutch, Gothic, Old High German, Anglo-Saxon, New High German, and Icelandic. Ten Kate presented irrefutable proof that these verbs, far from representing an erratic type of conjugation, were subject to rules that obtained not only in Gothic, but were valid for all branches of Germanic. “Die Durchführung dieser Entdeckung [*sic* daß die starken Verba den identischen Grundbau aller germanischen Sprachen bilden], bildet den wichtigsten Theil seiner *Aenleiding*”, von Raumer (1870: 142) concluded. A contemporary scholar, the Hamburg professor Michael Richey (1668-1761), deemed the *Aenleiding* “ein tiefforschendes ETYMOLOGICUM” – “*Ten Kate* verdienet näher gekannt zu werden”. Richey was of the opinion

daß derjenige, dem es um die Abstammungen und Verwandtschaften sowohl der Europäischen Sprachen insgesamt, als insonderheit der Teutschen, und ihre Mund-Arten, zu thun ist, dieses Holländische Hülffs-Mittel gar nicht für gleichgültig, sondern fast für unentbehrlich zu halten habe (Richey 1754: xlii-xliii). [162]

The frontispiece of the *Aenleiding* provides a splendid illustration of ten Kate’s methodological principles. In the left corner one sees a piece of ribbon on which is written “Qui quaerit invenit”, he who seeks will find; and in the foreground a cherub is tearing down a banner reading: “There is no rule without exception”. It was not without great satisfaction that ten Kate concluded that following his investigations “the common statement ‘there is no rule without exception’ no longer holds in our language” (1723, I: x). Ten Kate sought to formulate various *streekboudende dialect-regels*, i.e. consistent sound laws. It is evident, then, that his main concern was to establish regularity in language, something akin to ‘Ausnahmslosigkeit’.

Ten Kate's main point was to provide an introduction to "the exalted part of the Dutch language", i.e. its etymology. In order to provide a firm theoretical basis for his etymologizing he set out the principles which should in his view underlie the *geregelde afleiding* ('derivation according to fundamental rules') which should alone be relied upon for the correct etymologies of the Germanic languages, rather than the traditional addition, removal, transposition and mutation of letters. Consequently, he promised "not to alter, shift, eliminate or add a single letter except on the strength of a consistent rule" (1723, I: 175; cf. II: 6). Abandoning the techniques of ancient etymology, ten Kate described and justified his own research methods very carefully. He put forward a rigorous scientific approach: "the laws of language must be discovered and not be made" (ten Kate 1723, I: 13), as his *Stokregel* ('chorus line') goes (cf. 1723, I: 365, 398).

It has already been pointed out in several publications that the background to ten Kate's views is to be found in the Newtonian approach then reigning supreme in the Netherlands (cf. Jongeneelen 1992; Peeters 1990; cf. Verburg 1998: 337 sqq.). It does not surprise, then, that ten Kate's linguistic approach has recently been characterized as "Newtonian linguistics" (Salverda 2001). Thus it was that ten Kate was regarded as a pioneer of the inductive method and a worthy predecessor of the great Jacob Grimm (cf. Van de Velde 1980: 398-399). But what about the religious dimension of Lambert ten Kate's approach?

In the *Aenleiding* ten Kate does not conceal his religious presuppositions at all. The second "Redewisseling" ('dialogue'), for example, written early 1711, is not a 'technical' etymological treatise, but is devoted to the "Praise of Language, or the magnificence and dignity of speaking" (1723, I: 6-12). To ten Kate, language was a "divine gift" (1723, I: 6); its development and cultivation had been left to Adam, "in praise of his Benefactor" (1723, I: 9-10). And in the tenth dialogue, written around March 1713, ten Kate emphasizes that all scientific research should be subservient to the Divine Revelation; it should serve "to understand the Divine Preaching of all Creation". "The Dignity and Grandeur of our language [...], just like all other things created, and all other gifts the Creator bestowed upon us, draw our attention to Our Benefactor in a most spirited way" (ten Kate 1723, I: 332; cf. Dibbets 2002: 15). It is a statement which clearly marks ten Kate as a representative of the so-called physico-theology (cf. Evers 1988). [163]

Note that in the autumn of 1715 ten Kate decided to suspend his work on the *Aenleiding*, giving priority to what he considered to be a more urgent task. So the year 1716 saw the publication of ten Kate's Dutch adaptation of George Cheyne's *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion* (London 1705, 2nd ed. 1715), entitled *De Schepper en Zyn Bestier te kennen in Zyne Schepselen; Volgens het Licht der Reden en Wiskonst. Tot Ophouwen van Eerbiedigen Godsdienst en Vernietiging van alle Grondslag van Atheïstery* ('The Creator and His Government revealed in His Creatures; according to the light of reason and mathematics. On behalf of the constitution of respectful religion and the destruction of every basis of atheism'). George Cheyne (1671-1743) was among the Scottish Newtonians with whom Adriaen Verwer kept good contacts (Vermij 1991: 114). Eulogizing in the preface both his compatriot Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) and Isaac Newton, ten Kate attacked the Cartesian *Mechanismus*: one had indulged in a mixture of untested conjectures, "sitting in one's study and speculating", whereas nothing should be accepted but what was to be proved by clear tests and experiments. Newton's system is definitely superior to that of Descartes's. In his criticizing the "harmful Cartesian mechanism", which he considered to be abhorrent and dangerous particularly for younger people, ten Kate revealed himself as the pious Mennonite he had always been (cf. Noordegraaf 2002). To be sure, he did not like Spinoza's system either (cf. ten Kate 1716: *5r).

Instead of summing up I would like to refer to ten Kate's acquaintance, the well-known Amsterdam editor and professor Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736), who when reviewing the Dutch translation of Cheyne's book, commented

Son [*viz.* Cheyne's] dessein est de voir la nécessité de reconnoître un Créateur, par ses Ouvrages [...]. Le Traducteur [*viz.* ten Kate], qui entend fort bien la Philosophie & les Mathematiques, y a ajouté une Préface très-judicieuse; ou il fait voir, en peu des mots, les défauts des principes de *Descartes*, a l'égard de la formation de toutes choses, & la maniere dont Mr. le Chevalier *Newton* les a decouverts, par les principes opposez, qu'il a établis (Le Clerc 1715 [1716]: 447; 449).

6. *Final remarks*

I think it is now appropriate to offer a few concluding thoughts on Dutch Enlightenment Linguistics. In the early years of the eighteenth century it was the results of a study of the remnants of the Gothic language by Franciscus Junius which formed the major impetus for further research into the history and the affiliations of the beloved mother tongue, Dutch. Concurrently in the Netherlands many discussions lingered on between representatives of the atheistic “Radical Enlightenment”, such as the followers of Spinoza, and representatives of the more moderate “Mainstream Enlightenment”. In the battle against the “perverting minds” it was the works of Newton which were adjudged suitable, as I have previously indicated. As could be established, both Verwer and his “student” ten Kate made use of Newton’s ideas in their own philosophical-religious treatises. That the religious and prestigious Isaac Newton had also paved the way to an attractive methodology, namely a firm empirico-inductive approach, stood them in good stead. Adriaen Verwer introduced Newton’s views [164] into his own linguistic works, but he left it to his younger friend Lambert ten Kate to apply this approach to a major linguistic research project.

Thus, in the early decades of the eighteenth century the historical study of language was coupled to the empirico-inductive manner of carrying out scientific investigations. And as we all know, this felicitous alliance was to yield a most successful series of discoveries, in particular in nineteenth-century comparative historical linguistics.

A final observation. Jonathan Israel subtitled his study on *The Radical Enlightenment* “Philosophy and the making of modernity”. I think that the reaction to the so-called ‘Radical Enlightenment’, including its emphasis on an empirico-inductive approach, was to set the trend in linguistics for a long time to come, at least in the Netherlands. Grand deductive systems hardly appear in Dutch linguistics until the rise of generative grammar in the second half of the twentieth century. Certainly in this respect the discussions around 1700 have contributed in an essential way to the shaping of ‘modern’ linguistics.

7. Coda, or Heine refuted

The year 1767 saw the publication of Nicolas Beauzée’s (1717-1789) two volume *Grammaire générale ou exposition raisonnée des éléments nécessaires du langage, pour servir de fondement à l’étude de toutes les langues*, a book written in the tradition of general grammar, and a grammar “la plus achevée jamais écrite” (Auroux). In his preface the distinguished French grammarian acknowledged:

la voie de l’observation & de l’expérience est la seule qui puisse nous mener à la vérité. Descartes, ce génie puissant, l’honneur de son siècle & de la France sa patrie, séduit par les délires de son imagination féconde, fabriqua dans son cabinet le système ingénieux des tourbillons pour expliquer celui de l’univers: *Newton, génie aussi vaste, mais rendu plus sage par les écarts mêmes de notre philosophe, vint avec des faits & des expériences répétées, vérifiées, comparées; & les tourbillons de Descartes disparurent. Il en est partout comme en physique: nous ne pouvons, dans quelque genre que ce soit, connoître les causes que par les effets, ni les principes des arts que par leurs productions; & il n’y a qu’une longue suite d’expériences,*

d'observations, & de comparaisons, qui puisse nous mettre en état d'apprécier la juste valeur, l'étendue, & les bornes d'un principe (Beauzée 1767: I, xiv-xv; italics added).⁷

This preface was written in 1767 – who said that in the Netherlands everything happened fifty years later? [165]

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⁷ I would like to add that in his grammar Beauzée refers at least once to the *Introductio ad philosophiam metaphysicam et logicam continens* (1736) composed by the famous Dutch Newtonian Hermannus Boerhaave, “le célèbre Boerhaave” as Voltaire called him. As to the profound influence of Dutch physical scientists on French Enlightenment cf. Wagner 1973: 159; Verburg 1998: 383 sqq.

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